

# The Path to the Aisle

A Q&A with Basic Rights Oregon's Executive Director on the impact of recent national marriage equality victories

April's been quite the month for spring showers, and in some states, showers of the bridal kind. On April 3, Iowa became the third state in the country, after Massachusetts and Connecticut, to legalize same-sex marriages. The following Tuesday, April 7, Vermont joined the club—the first to do so through a legislature's vote. And as *Just Out* went to press, related developments in New Hampshire, New York, Washington D.C. and even Washington State gave new hope to Oregon proponents.

Our journey, of course, depends upon the reversal of Measure 36, the 2004 constitutional amendment by which voters defined marriage as a union of one man and one woman. At the forefront of the marriage-equality cause—and the campaign to overturn Measure 36 in 2012—is Basic Rights Oregon. *JO* caught up with BRO's Executive Director Jeana Frazzini for her thoughts on how these developments have affected what she views a groundbreaking, "proactive" bid for the ballot.

**This must be an invigorating time for BRO. Were you expecting this national political groundswell?**

"To see the number of states of marriage equality double within a week's time was just incredible. In terms of what we were expecting, there are a number of states that are in process with some expectation of results coming out in 2009. Vermont and Iowa were certainly at the top of that list. There are a few other states that we're looking at, and

certainly we're watching closely what's happening in California.

I think for us it just sort of reinforces that we're on the right path in Oregon, that we're doing the work necessary to break new ground in our own way. So the fact that Vermont's the first legislative vote and Iowa's the first unanimous decision, it just reinforces our hope of being the first state to overturn a marriage amendment and secure marriage equality at the ballot."

—Amanda Schurr



Jeana Frazzini says of BRO's marriage equality cause. "This issue requires real and meaningful dialogue with folks who just may not agree with us yet. ... The earlier we start that conversation, the more intensity that folks bring to it, the more effective we can be at ending this exclusion."

of a big public fight, for instance over the ballot, over the amendment campaign in 2004, where there's really any conversation happening about marriage equality. ... It's a longer term conversation that needs to be had. We've got to build a solid foundation. ... The idea that voters get to decide the fundamental human rights of our community is not a question that we take lightly."

**You make repeated mention of a conversation with the public, with 2.1 million Oregon voters. What has BRO been hearing over the last month?**

"We continue to hear the full spectrum of voices from the community that overwhelmingly want to seize the energy, the enthusiasm and the momentum that is created by this great news over the last couple of weeks. And at the same time, tether that sense of urgency and enthusiasm with real thoughtful dialogue and ensure that we're building the kind of alliances that can support a strong multi-racial campaign, reaching into all 36 counties, engaging all Oregonians. We have seen all too often, most recently in California and certainly in Oregon before, that our opponents will work to divide us."

**Realistically speaking, are you more optimistic now than 5 years ago?**

"Yes. Absolutely. ... We continue to study what other states have done, talking with them, learning from movement leaders in national and state organizations. We're looking at best practices. There's been a tremendous amount of learning on making the case for marriage equality over the last five years. We are light years ahead of where we were in 2004, when we first engaged this conversation with the community. And that, I think, is a lot of what our work is about at this point." *JO*

For more information on Basic Rights Oregon, visit [www.basicrightsoregon.org](http://www.basicrightsoregon.org).

**Why Iowa and Vermont, why not Oregon?**

"Learning from other states is obviously a really important part of this process. We have to learn from the victories that we have in our own community and the setbacks that we face, as well as watching what's happening in other places. Vermont, for instance, won support from their legislature after an eight-year campaign. ... Compared to Oregon eight years ago, we were still fighting brutal antigay ballot measures. Each of the states at this point has its own sort of path to walk, if you will, in securing marriage equality."

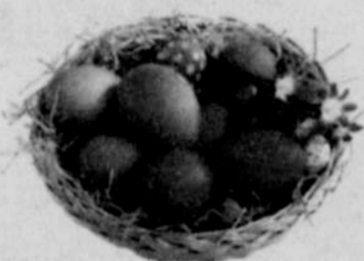
**How has what's happened in the last month affected BRO's campaign?**

"What it does is bring a kind of energy and focus to the issue that's necessary to successfully drive a conversation. This issue requires real and meaningful dialogue with folks who just may not agree with us yet. ... The earlier we start that conversation, the more intensity that folks bring to it, the more effective we can be at ending this exclusion."

**So there are no concrete changes or details in the wake of this news?**

"I think that, again, this gives us the opportunity to move the conversation. For far too long, the issue's been treated like a political football and it's only in the context

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